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Leisure Studies
Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:
http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rlst20

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Version of record first published: 24 Apr 2009.

To cite this article: Margaret E. Beck & Jeanne E. Arnold (2009): Gendered time use at home: an ethnographic examination of leisure time in middle-class families, Leisure Studies, 28:2, 121-142

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02614360902773888

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Leisure Studies
Vol. 28, No. 2, April 2009, 121–142

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Gendered time use at home: an ethnographic examination of leisure time in middle-class families

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(*Received 27 September 2008; final version received 18 December 2008*)

Home is often conceived as a refuge for busy working parents, but new findings indicate that relatively little leisure takes place there. We describe the indoor home leisure activities of middle-class, dual-earner parents, using ethnographic data from 32 Los Angeles-area families of many ethnicities and real income levels. In our analysis, we rely most heavily on systematic scan sampling data in which the locations and activities of each family member were documented by hand-held computer every 10 minutes. Only about 15% of parents' time at home appears to be dedicated to leisure activities. Of that leisure time, nearly all is experienced indoors, much of it in passive and often non-interactive contexts like watching television. Both mothers and fathers often experience indoor free time in very short, fragmented episodes, although fathers are more likely to have some longer periods of leisure. There are also gender inequalities in how often, when during the day, and where in the house parents spend their leisure time, although these inequalities are more pronounced in some families than others.

Keywords: leisure; time allocation; working parents; gender distinctions; United States

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Introduction

Leisure is an important aspect of individual development, family life, social relationships, and culture (Just, 1980; Mead, 1960; Rubin, Flowers, & Gross, 1986). One would expect leisure to be a focus of anthropological study, and it is, within certain bounds. Anthropologists are certainly interested in *types* of leisure activities within and outside the home (Ardalan, 1978; Ray & Ray, 1995), such as sports and exercise (Blanchard, 1991; Edwards, 2003; Johnson, 2001; Sorek, 2003), dancing (Farrer, 2004; Potuoglu-Cook, 2006), clubbing (Lynch & Badger, 2006), and even coffee drinking (Yodanis, 2006) and television viewing (Selberg, 1998) as they reflect, present, and initiate others into social relationships, shared histories, and cultural and class norms.

However, basic data about when, where, and how leisure takes place, at least in the mainstream cultures of industrialised nations, is less the province of anthropology than other fields. Anthropologists may address the amount of leisure or how families share leisure within non-industrialised or minority groups (Godoy, 2002; Richards, 1974), but for comparable data in the USA or Europe, one must generally turn to

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ISSN 0261-4367 print/ISSN 1466-4496 online
© 2009 Taylor & Francis
DOI: 10.1080/02614360902773888
http://www.informaworld.com

sociology or leisure studies. In this paper, we bring our anthropological perspective to bear on leisure within middle-class families in the USA, arguing that anthropology cannot afford to exclude a subject with such profound implications for the nature and quality of life.

Leisure data may be more important than ever for studying cultures in the wake of 'new capitalism', which fundamentally changed the relationship between white-collar workers and their employers (Sennett, 2006). Workers shifted from members of a corporate family to free agents on an open market, continually forced to prove their value and marketability in an uncertain environment of downsizing and high mobility. The resulting increased work hours and higher personal investment in work have arguably taken their toll on family and community relationships and personal well-being (Philipson, 2002; Putnam, 2000; Schor, 1992; Whybrow, 2005).

We focus here on the indoor, at-home leisure of US dual-earner parents with school-age children. We chose this topic for several reasons. First, as noted above, leisure time contributes to the health of individuals and their relationships and to cultural transmission. It is also a good arena for observing family relationships and structures such as gender roles, which structure obligations and, by extension, time free from these obligations (Deem, 1982; Henderson, 1994; Shaw, 1994; Wearing, 1998). Second, dual-earner parents suffer marked time stress (Bookman, 2004; Schor, 1992), perhaps showing the effects of this economic shift most clearly. Third, 'home' for these families has been valorised as a refuge from work and other external stresses. Considerable money is spent on homes throughout the USA to create these refuges, particularly master bedroom suites and relaxation spaces such as backyard patios (Graesch, 2004). Fourth, few studies of leisure time have directly observed its manifestations at home; rather, the focus is on entertainment, sports, vacations, and other activities away from home. We are able to investigate how families actually experience time – including ordinary leisure – within their homes. This paper considers *indoor* leisure time in depth; a complementary study from the larger project data set has shown that parents' outdoor leisure time at the home is strikingly limited (Arnold & Lang, 2007).

Our analysis addresses the indoor leisure activities of middle-class, dual-earner parents, including the types of leisure activities they select, where leisure occurs within the home, and gender differences in leisure. A team of ethnographers gathered the field data between 2002 and 2005. This study is part of a larger research enterprise that included extended videotaping of family interactions over the course of about one week, interviews, systematic recording of family activities at 10-minute intervals, mapping of the homes, comprehensive digital photography of spaces and objects in the homes, social network analyses, and cortisol studies (Arnold & Lang, 2007; Beck, 2007; Broege, Owens, Graesch, Arnold, & Schneider, 2007; Fasulo, Loyd, & Padiglione, 2007; Klein, Izquierdo, & Bradbury, 2007; Kremer-Sadlik & Kim, 2007; Ochs, Graesch, Mittmann, Bradbury, & Repetti, 2006; Ochs & Shohet, 2006; Saxbe, Repetti, & Nishina, 2007).

All 32 families in the study reside in Los Angeles County, and the parents are homeowners (with a mortgage) who work at least 30 hours per week. The families have two to three children, at least one of whom is 8–10 years old, and they self-identify as members of the US middle class. Now at the end of an intensive five-year data collection and data transcription phase, we have assembled a large corpus of in-depth records of daily life from each of these busy, heavily scheduled young families. Saddled as they are with multiple work and home obligations, they provide a useful sample to

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examine time budgets in the home, particularly how parents actually spend their 'free' hours and how much leisure they have.

Many studies of US adults have shown how they spend their time, typically through surveys or variants of time-diary studies (e.g. Bianchi, Robinson, & Milkie, 2006; Robinson & Godbey, 1997). We use the rich ethnographic (observational) data sets from our study not to replace but to complement this work. Unlike data from the American Time Use Survey, our data permit us to match couples and families, seeing which activities people engage in collectively and for which couples there is an imbalance of leisure. Because our study was situated in families' homes, we are uniquely positioned to examine their activities at home and over the course of all segments of the day, most days of the week, and all rooms at the house. We are also able to document the objects of material culture with which family members interact.

In this discussion, we focus on how much of the parents' indoor time at home is available for leisure activities and how and where that time is spent. Our research addresses such questions as whether parents' indoor leisure time is (1) comparably limited in duration, (2) more or less fragmented (that is, frequently interrupted), (3) primarily constituted by passive activities oriented towards electronic media (as opposed to exercise, crafts, and the like), and (4) variable by gender.

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Methods

Two videographers observed and filmed 32 Los Angeles families for two weekday mornings and late afternoons/evenings, one Saturday morning, and one Sunday morning and late afternoon/evening. Thirty families have parents who are heterosexual married couples, and two families are co-fathered (life partners). While the filming was ongoing, often focused on one or two family members, the location and activity of every family member was also observed by a third ethnographer and recorded by hand-held computer at 10-minute intervals, providing a quantitative measure of where and how each person spent his or her time (see Ochs et al., 2006, for an overview of filming and tracking methods). We label these systematic and nearly simultaneous observations the 'tracking' data, a form of scan sampling. In addition, study participants self-reported their home lives and experiences in narrated 'home tours', events during which the parents – each individually – walked through home spaces with a video camera and described the rooms, objects of material culture, and activities typically performed by the families. These narrations are dominated by commentary on indoor spaces, furnishings, and activities, with comparatively little attention given to the yards and patios.

For each family in the study, on weekdays (Monday to Thursday), scan sampling observations began in the morning when the family woke up, paused when people left the home for work and school, and then continued when they returned home through the evening until the children went to bed. The clock times of observations necessarily varied with the individual families' routines. Most weekday morning observations were between 6:30 and 8:30 am, although some were as early as 5:20 am and some were as late as 9:20 am. The late afternoon/evening observations usually began at or around 4:00 pm, although a few began as early as 2:10 pm. They ended at times ranging from 8:10–10:20 pm, which coincided with or shortly preceded children's bedtimes.

On Saturdays, observations began in the morning when the family awakened and continued until approximately noon. Observations began as early as 6:40 am, but most

were after 8:00 am. The latest Saturday observations were at 12:30 pm. The pattern was similar on Sundays, except that researchers returned in the late afternoons. Sunday morning observations began as early as 6:30 am and continued until as late as 1:20 pm although, like Saturday mornings, most were between 8 am and noon. Sunday late afternoon/evening observations began at or around 4:00 pm and ended between 7:40 and 9:50 pm, around the time when children went to bed.

Since each of the 32 families was followed for several days, we have a large number of data points, or scan sampling records, of parents' activities in their homes (N = 7444). These scan sampling records for parents (Table 1) span about 1241 hours of observation, an average of almost 40 hours per family. Our analysis here uses the 5356 records for which the parent is at home and our observation incorporates complete time and activity data. This subset excludes cases in which the parent was behind a closed door for privacy or the observation was otherwise incomplete.

The scan sampler observed every at-home family member's behaviour every 10 minutes. Records note what we label as the 'primary' activity and, if applicable, the 'secondary' activity, along with which home space they were occupying and primary objects and people they interacted with. The primary and secondary activities are defined further below. When describing time-use patterns throughout this paper, our language in several instances may appear to suggest that each observation represents 10 minutes of *sustained* activity. Although it may have been the case, this was not necessarily true because brief unrecorded activities and interruptions took place between observations. Figures presented in terms of numbers of 'minutes' should therefore be read as maximums. For instance, four consecutive leisure observations for one mother could equal 40 minutes of leisure *at the most*. But if her leisure was interrupted between observations, she could have had far less. We thus err on the side of potentially overstating leisure as it is defined here.

This approach quantifies leisure with regard to clock time, treating leisure time as a commodity available in limited amounts and potentially unequally available to different household members (Macnaghten & Urry, 1998, pp. 136–137). Such a view of leisure is difficult to avoid in industrialised societies where people have internalised clock time as actual time, frequently treat time as money, and budget the use of

Table 1. Summary of observation points in scan sampling data.

Observation type	Location at home	Mother[a]/ parent A	Father[a]/ parent B	Total
At-home observations				
Heterosexual married couples (n = 30)	Indoor	2558	1967	4525
	Outdoor	165	249	414
Heterosexual married couples subtotal		2723	2216	4939
Co-fathers (n = 2)	Indoor	189	217	406
	Outdoor	10	1	11
Co-fathers subtotal		199	218	417
Total		2922	2434	5356
Observations not at home or incomplete		802	1286	2088
Total		3724	3720	7444

[a]In heterosexual married couples.

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personal time around their work schedules (Adam, 1990, p. 120; 2004, p. 127; Macnaghten & Urry, 1998, p. 141).

Indoor spaces

Indoor spaces are defined here as all of the finished spaces within a house's walls. In our sample, leisure activities occurred in the following types of indoor spaces: living room and family room, kitchen, dining room, breakfast nook, parents' bedroom, child's bedroom, playroom, office, hallway or stairs, bathroom, and pantry. Spaces such as the hallway or stairs, bathroom, and pantry were used only occasionally and not for extended periods.

We do not consider garages indoor spaces for purposes of this analysis because they are generally unfinished, their design facilitates storage of cars and outdoor-oriented gear, and they are obviously primarily thresholds to the outdoors. (This is also consistent with how garages are defined by real estate professionals; they are not included in interior square footage.) A few families blurred this distinction, using part or all of their garages instead as living spaces by adding furniture and accessories (Arnold & Lang, 2007, pp. 41–44; Graesch, 2006, table 5.4). But unless a garage was formally remodelled to create a new, functionally specific room, we coded it as a garage (even if a couch and TV were placed in a corner) and therefore excluded it from indoor space for present purposes. This decision affects only a few records. Parents were observed in the garage 82 times, or about 1% of the scan sampling records, many of which were unrelated to leisure. In point of fact, the heaviest usage of garages among these families today is as a storage space for overflowing possessions, not as a place for either parking cars or conducting family activities (Arnold & Lang, 2007).

Leisure

Leisure time is often equated with free time, which is 'the time that remains after maintaining one's body in a healthy and socially acceptable state [self care], contracting time to the market [paid work], and meeting domestic and family responsibilities [unpaid work]' (Bittman & Wajcman, 2000, p. 167; clarifications added). Free time may include religious practice, voluntary education, or civic obligations as well as activities more traditionally considered 'leisure'. Cross (2006, p. 193) defines leisure as 'all those things that people do when they are not obliged to work or take care of others and themselves'. In our examination of indoor leisure activities at home, we focus on activities undertaken for relaxation or enjoyment.

Goodin, Rice, Bittman, and Saunders (2005) distinguish between discretionary time (the amount of time potentially available to people after the bare minimum of time is spent on paid work, unpaid work, and self care) and free time, which is the unallocated time actually experienced. There is a discrepancy between the two because some may 'spend more time than strictly necessary [on required tasks], or achieve more in those realms than strictly necessary' (Goodin et al., 2005, p. 44; clarification added). For example, some unpaid work may be discretionary. Time-diary data show that married mothers with increased paid work time offset this by decreasing housework rather than decreasing childcare, sleep, or leisure (Bianchi et al., 2006). The question of whether some time poverty is self-imposed is a fascinating one, but it is beyond the scope of our discussion here and an issue we cannot address with our data.

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Leisure at home – or at least the expectation of free evenings and weekends at home – is actually a fairly recent phenomenon stemming from increasingly sharp distinctions drawn during the early 1900s between time spent at intense job sites and time at home away from such demands. Cross (2006, pp. 199–200) refers to this as the 'domestication' of leisure. Many twentieth-century technologies, including the car and the explosion of electronic media, have contributed to a decline in collective and interactive leisure and a rise in passive and more 'private' or isolated forms of leisure. In their comparison of time-diary data from 1965, 1975, and 1985, Robinson and Godbey (1997) argue that increased television viewing over that span (which has by all accounts become even more pronounced since 1985) is correlated with increased family time spent at home and decreased interaction with others outside of the home.

Some studies of leisure time continue to focus on activities that take place outside the home (Cross, 2006; Stearns, 2006), including watching sports events, playing sports and games, going on vacations, going to the theatre or movies, gambling, dancing, eating out, and the like. Others primarily address the amount of time spent in leisure, often in the context of overall trends in time use (Robinson & Godbey, 1997) and general types of leisure (such as social, civic, active, or passive; see Bianchi et al., 2006). Television is one activity generally singled out because of its dominance of at-home leisure activities and its social and cultural impact.

Within our detailed study of a relatively small number of families, we have the capacity to examine home-based leisure in depth. Broege et al. (2007) classify hundreds of distinct activities in the project database into 11 primary categories: leisure, household management, chores, communication, childcare, children's school-work at home, work at home, eating/snacking, personal time, personal care, and other. As an ethnographic project, this study of course differs from time-diary studies in that activity categories were not assigned by the participants themselves to their own activities but were assigned by the researchers. Compatibility of these activity labels with self-assigned, self-labelled activities from other working family studies using time diaries or beep-and-record methods has been examined by Broege et al. (2007) and found to be high. Nonetheless, for the purposes of appropriately classifying each person's occasionally complex, dual activities (often both a primary and a secondary activity), we found it necessary to develop rules for consistent classification. It is important to characterise every moment of observation (each data point) as accurately as possible as a leisure moment or a non-leisure moment. The primary activity is usually the category determinant, with some exceptions discussed below. Common leisure activities in our sample include watching TV (which here includes watching movies at home on a VCR or DVD player), playing video games, reading, watching other family members, and playing with puzzles. We created an 'other' category used in only 12 cases, which includes activities such as 'doing nothing', whistling, and hiding a gift from another family member.

When a non-leisure activity is the primary recorded activity, we rarely considered the observation as leisure for this study (e.g. folding laundry while watching TV is not classified as leisure). Any combination of a leisure activity with a formal meal is classified as 'eating/snacking' rather than leisure (e.g. eating dinner while watching TV is not a leisure activity for our purposes here). *The guiding principle is that those activities considered supportive of the functional operation of the household and keeping the family fed and clean (e.g. eating, cooking, doing laundry, paying bills, doing schoolwork) are distinguished from those that were largely or clearly not (e.g.*

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TV, games, snacking, sports). Any combination of a leisure activity with informal snacking or drinking is classified as leisure. Talking, as the only activity, is considered 'communication', but talking during a leisure activity is instead 'leisure'. (Consider that talking during TV watching or a video game does not change the focus of the activity away from leisure.) Alcohol consumption is labelled leisure, even as a secondary activity, although smoking was required to be the primary activity to be considered leisure. Sleeping is an unavoidable necessity, but sleeping after 9 am or before 9 pm by parents is considered leisure in this analysis and is labelled 'resting'. As a result of these classification rules, our data contain both 'pure leisure' and multiple combined leisure activities, and we are excluding 'leisure time contaminated by combination with unpaid work', as defined by Bittman and Wajcman (2000, p. 181). These purer forms of leisure may be increasingly hard to come by in industrialised societies that experience 'technological and organisational changes which break down distinctions of … leisure and work' (Macnaghten & Urry, 1998, p. 151).

It is of course difficult to pin down the perfect definition of leisure, and we cannot claim to have done so here, making the decisions described above for ease of analysis and consistency. Our definition of 'leisure', because it excludes some communication situations and excludes leisure combined with work, may seem incomplete or arbitrary. We readily concede that talking, for example, may sometimes be a significant leisure experience, and on the other hand, we acknowledge that feminist scholars argue that women rarely experience the unmitigated freedom from responsibility implied in classic definitions of leisure (Chambers, 1986; Green, Hebron, & Woodward, 1990; Shaw, 1997; Wearing, 1998). For present purposes, we sought to use all cases that could be unambiguously coded as leisure activities. Our methods do not assess our participants' experiences of leisure, only the time apparently spent pursuing it while visibly and at least momentarily free from other obligations. We may thus underestimate the leisurely qualities of certain activities or certain moments. Because we applied our classification system consistently to all family members, however, we can see patterns in time and space use even with what may be imperfect data.

Results: activity patterns from scan sampling

Almost all of the parents' home-based leisure activities – and indeed their activities of all types – take place in *indoor* spaces. Other data from our project reveal that dual-earner parents with young children spend little time in their homes' outdoor spaces, and only a tiny fraction of that time is spent in leisure activities (Arnold & Lang, 2007). Our current analysis shows that when a parent is home, 92% of observations of him or her (4931 of the 5356 complete observations) occur within the house rather than in the exterior spaces around the house. This is a striking finding in a city where the mild climate allows for outdoor activity nearly year-round. We might imagine that this pronounced indoor orientation of dual-earner parents may be magnified in the colder climes of the US Northeast, Midwest, and Plains.

Given this preponderance of time spent indoors, how often are the parents enjoying leisure time? When we consider all indoor at-home observations, leisure activities occur in 16.4% of (complete) records for parents. These 881 complete records include 818 records for parents in the 30 heterosexual married couples (343 for mothers and 475 for fathers) and 63 records for parents in the two co-fathered families. In the

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following analyses, we address indoor leisure patterns across times of day and spaces of the home for all 32 sets of parents in our study and then turn to gender differences exhibited by the 30 heterosexual married couples.

When and where home leisure occurs (all parents)

We summarise indoor leisure observations by time of day and day of the week for all 32 sets of parents, expressed as percentages (Table 2). During our observation periods, the times of day most often used for leisure by parents were weeknight evenings after 7 pm, Saturday mornings before 8 am, Sunday mornings before 9 am, and Sunday evenings after 7 pm – in sum, early weekend mornings and evenings after dinner. The timing of the evening leisure is no surprise, given that it coincides with prime-time television programming.

The most frequent parental indoor leisure activity, by far, is watching television (Table 3). During our observations, parents spent about 50% of their indoor leisure time (8% of their time at home overall) watching TV (or a programme on a VCR or DVD). About 10% of the TV observations were coded as VCR or DVD use. Parents were reading in 21% of indoor leisure observations. Newspapers are the most common reading material (60% of reading observations), but books (20%), magazines (18%), catalogues (1%), and newsletters (1%) were also read during the study. The largely or completely non-interactive activities of television viewing and reading

Table 2. Indoor leisure observations by time of day and day of week, expressed as percentages (both parents, 32 families).

Time	Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thur	Sat	Total	Weekday	Weekend
Morning									
5:20–5:50			0		0		0	0	
6:00–6:50	17	0	5	11	10	50	10	9	33
7:00–7:50	21	2	3	6	6	19	8	4	20
8:00–8:50	23	17	9	5	0	10	14	2	16
9:00–9:50	12	0	20	0		14	13	0	13
10:00–10:50	16					18	17	0	17
11:00–11:50	8					15	11	0	11
Afternoon									
12:00–13:50	6					3	5	0	5
14:00–15:50		0	9	5	24		12	12	
16:00–16:50	15	0	0	11	31		12	12	15
17:00–17:50	18	0	2	9	4		11	5	18
Evening									
18:00–18:50	14	0	11	14	11		12	11	14
19:00–19:50	23	28	14	16	22		20	19	23
20:00–20:50	34	23	23	25	46		32	31	34
21:00–21:50	22	25	24	20	31		23	24	22
22:00–22:20		0	0	100			44	44	
Average	19	13	12	14	20	14	16	12	18

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Table 3. Indoor leisure observations of parents (all 32 families in the sample).

Activity category	Total	Percent all[a]	Percent leisure[b]
Alcohol	2	0.0	0.2
Craft/hobby	8	0.1	0.9
Exercise	6	0.1	0.7
Game/puzzle	53	1.0	6.0
Home decoration	2	0.0	0.2
Internet	15	0.3	1.7
Observing family	49	0.9	5.6
Other	14	0.3	1.6
Pets	6	0.1	0.7
Playing (with child)	49	0.9	5.6
Political activity	2	0.0	0.2
Read	181	3.4	20.5
Rest	24	0.4	2.7
Smoke	3	0.1	0.3
Sports	1	0.0	0.1
TV	439	8.2	49.8
Video game	27	0.5	3.1
Total	881	16.4	100.0

[a]Of 5356 at-home observations with complete data.
[b]Of 881 leisure observations.

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account for about 70% of parents' indoor leisure time. Parents spent 18% of indoor leisure time playing games or puzzles, playing in general with their children, and simply observing other family members in various activities. Other leisure activities occurred in low frequencies, including video games (3%) and recreational (non-work/non-e-mail) internet use (2%).

Roughly two-thirds of parents' leisure time was spent in the living room and family room spaces (Table 4). Most of parents' television viewing and reading occurred there, as well as playing games and puzzles, playing with children, and observing family. Parents used eating areas, such as the kitchen, dining room, and breakfast nooks, in 16% of their leisure time. Popular kitchen-based leisure activities were reading, observing family, and television viewing. Reading and observing family also took place in the dining room, but – perhaps because of large dining room tables – this was another common place for games and puzzles. Parents spent 14% of leisure time in one of the bedrooms. Parents' bedrooms were usually used for TV and for resting. On the other hand, children's bedrooms were places where parents and children participated in games and puzzles, recreational internet use, reading, playing, and crafts and hobbies. Taking all 32 families into account, on average, each parent engaged in indoor leisure during 3.0 ten-minute-interval observations on a weekday (mostly in late afternoon or evening), 1.6 such observations on a Saturday morning, and 5.1 such observations on a Sunday (including morning and late afternoon or evening). This generally represents well under one hour of indoor leisure per parent on any given day during the periods of observation (recall that six 10-minute-interval observations would approximate one hour of leisure, if uninterrupted). As we will see,

Table 4. Parents' leisure activities by room type (both parents, all 32 families).

Activity category	Living room or family room	Eating rooms	Bedrooms	Other	Total
Alcohol	0	2	0	0	2
Craft/hobby	4	1	2	1	8
Exercise	0	0	1	5	6
Game/puzzle	27	14	12	0	53
Home decoration	2	0	0	0	2
Internet	4	0	6	5	15
Observing family	22	22	2	3	49
Other	5	5	3	1	14
Pets	2	2	1	1	6
Playing (with child)	30	12	7	0	49
Political activity	0	2	0	0	2
Read	100	68	12	1	181
Rest	6	1	17	0	24
Smoke	2	1	0	0	3
Sports	1	0	0	0	1
TV	373	11	46	9	439
Video game	9	0	14	4	27
Leisure total	587	141	123	30	881
Percent (%)	67	16	14	3	100

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many mothers enjoyed less leisure time than these averages would indicate, and these moments were rarely strung together.

Gender differences in indoor leisure

For the 30 married couples, the fathers and mothers differ in their time use patterns in multiple ways. These fathers were not at home for 31% of all potential observation times (often still at work in late afternoons), nearly twice as often as women (17%) were not at home (Table 1). Also, mothers on average got up earlier in the mornings. Our observations (which do not include activities behind closed doors) encompass significantly more pre-8 am records for mothers. Men also enjoyed more leisure time, including time spent in indoor leisure. Among heterosexual married parents in our sample, men enjoyed roughly 1.4 times as many moments of indoor leisure time as women, with 475 leisure observations to women's 343. In most cases, the differences between parents were relatively small in absolute terms, because as noted earlier, parents generally did not experience much leisure time during the study period.

The term 'leisure gap' refers to inequity in leisure time between members of a couple, and specifically to the greater leisure time enjoyed by men (Hochschild, 1989). Not all fathers in our study had more indoor leisure time than mothers, but nearly three-quarters (22 of 30) of them did. Women had more leisure time among the remaining eight couples. Moreover, the *difference* in indoor leisure time between spouses is larger when fathers are getting more. On average, when they enjoyed more

leisure, fathers experienced 8.4 more indoor leisure observations than mothers over the study period. When mothers got more, they had on average 6.6 more leisure observations than their spouses.

Some of this pattern is due to a small number of families (four families or 13%) in which the father has notably more leisure time than the mother. The leisure gaps in these families (identified as Families 8, 17, 18, and 20 in our study) favour men by 16–28 observations, or roughly 2.7–4.7 hours more leisure time over the course of the observation week. In two of these families (Families 8 and 18), the mothers expressed clear frustration to our study team about the lack of time for themselves and the division of household labour. In the other two families, the fathers have taken over some household tasks such as cooking, apparently obscuring leisure inequities or alleviating any resentment over them. The mother in Family 20 is especially appreciative, observing that her husband 'does a lot of work. I mean, we could not do what we do if it wasn't for [my husband] because I could plan as many things as I wanted to, but I couldn't physically do it all'.

Another clear trend is that both mothers and fathers in our Los Angeles families have many quite 'fragmented' indoor leisure episodes. They often experience leisure in small segments interrupted by other activities (such as the need to attend to a child or a chore). An episode is defined here as a series of consecutive observations. We organised the 343 indoor leisure observations for mothers and 475 for fathers into 189 and 247 episodes, respectively. The average duration of a leisure episode was less than two observations (thus representing fewer than 20 minutes). Episodes never lasted more than 12 observations and represented periods from 10 to 120 minutes in length. The distribution of leisure episodes of varying durations is similar for mothers and fathers; fathers just have more episodes (see Figure 1). The vast majority of leisure events (about 90%) for both parents lasted 30 or fewer minutes. Fathers enjoyed a

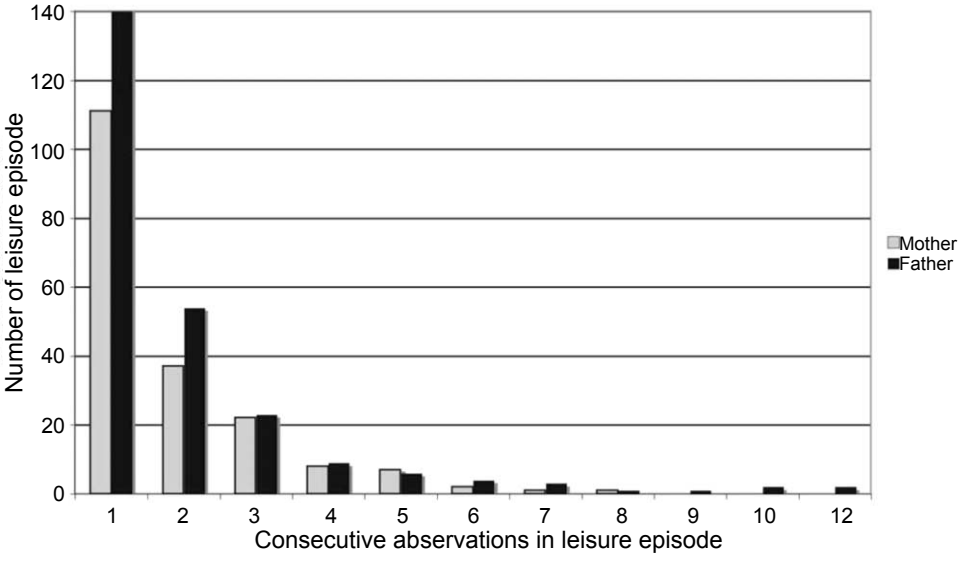

Figure 1. Length of indoor leisure episodes, represented by the number of consecutive observations.

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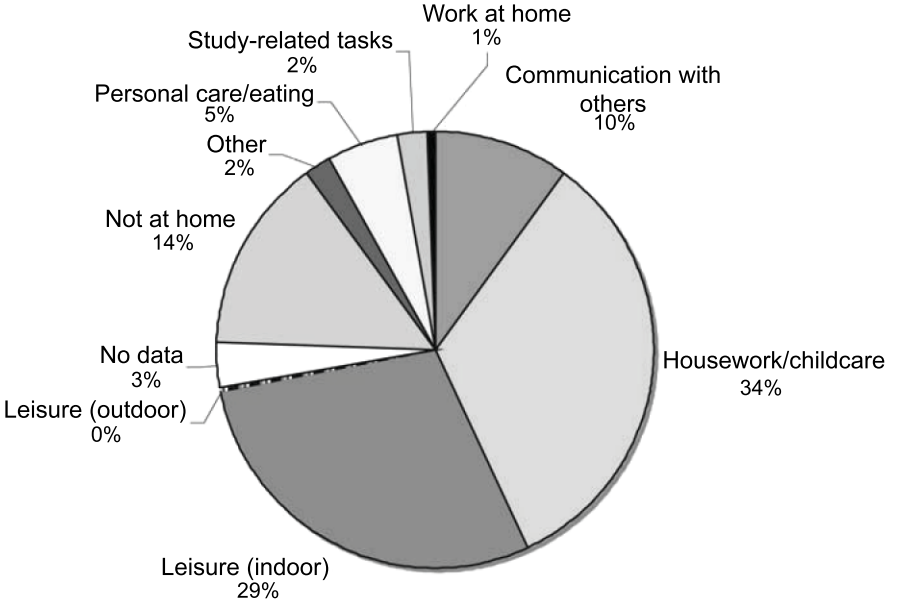

Figure 2. Mothers' activities during fathers' indoor leisure (heterosexual couples).

slightly higher percentage of episodes representing more than one hour (5%) than did mothers (2%).

We also examined what parents were doing when their spouses were engaged in indoor leisure activities. These data were gathered case-by-case for each couple. Fathers' extra indoor leisure time comes from a variety of sources (Figure 2). When fathers were experiencing indoor leisure, often mothers handled housework or child-care responsibilities (this occurred during 34% of fathers' indoor leisure observations) or were not at home (14%). Mothers had simultaneous indoor leisure time with their husbands (although not necessarily *together* with him) in 29% of observations. At the times when mothers were carving out a few indoor leisure moments, fathers were much more likely to take simultaneous leisure time and were also much less likely to handle housework or child-care responsibilities at such times (Figure 3). Not all fathers were able to enjoy leisure while their wives were busy with other tasks, of course. Sitting down for a moment during his home tour, one father remarked, 'if I sat here long enough … someone would certainly come up here and interrupt me from doing this'.

There are also some gender differences in terms of the time of day when parents find indoor leisure time. It was not uncommon for fathers to experience some leisure on weekday mornings, although mothers rarely did this (Table 5). Mothers were more likely than fathers to spend *early* weekend mornings in leisure, however. There is also an interesting progression in the gender differences revealed through analysis of the segments of time from dinner preparation/homework times (4:00–5:50), through the dinner and clean-up hours (6:00–7:50), and into the prime-time post-dinner hour (8:00–8:50). During the period from 4 to 6 pm, mothers on average experienced 6.5% of their time as leisure, while fathers spent 18% of this span in leisure activities, a striking difference. From 6 to 8 pm, mothers were at 14.5% and fathers at 19.5%.

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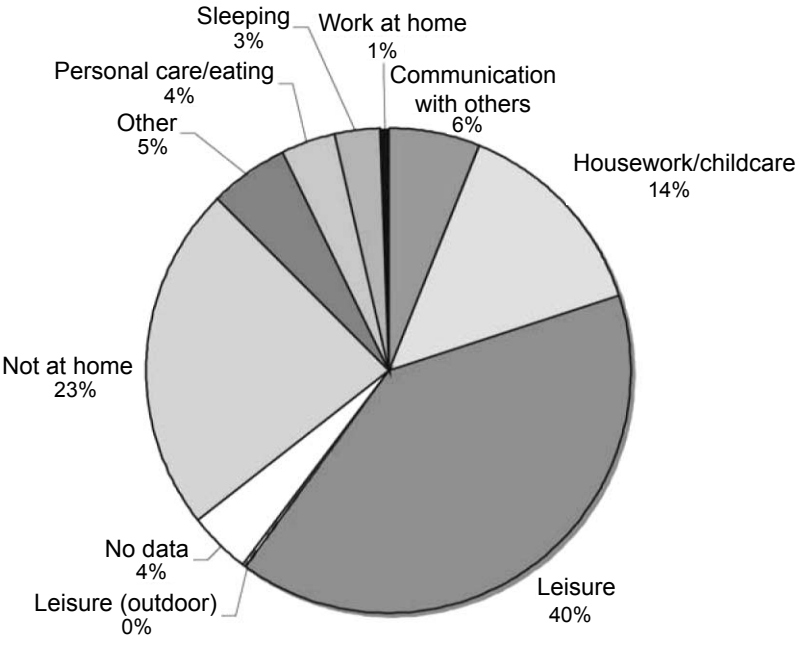

Figure 3. Fathers' activities during mothers' indoor leisure (heterosexual couples).

From 8 to 9 pm, often marking the onset of children's bedtimes, we again see a pronounced difference: 23% (mothers) vs. 42% leisure time (fathers). This suggests that during these specific labour-demanding intervals, mothers on average enjoy far less leisure time than fathers.

Mothers and fathers used the leisure time they had in generally similar ways (Table 6), with about 53% of time spent on television and 19% on reading. Mothers spent more of their leisure time playing games and puzzles, playing with children, and playing with pets than did fathers. Fathers spent slightly more time engaging in crafts and hobbies, using the internet for recreation, resting, and simply watching other family members. Participation in video games yielded the largest gender difference; fathers played these much more often than mothers. They both played video games with their children and played their own favourite games alone. One father, for instance, expressed a special fondness for the 'NBA Live' game during his narrated home tour.

The indoor leisure gap between parents was not observed in the two co-fathered families, who had a remarkably even distribution of leisure (Table 7). It is not clear, with this small sample, whether this might be a consistent difference between heterosexual and two-father couples or what other differences might exist in time use and household labour. Another striking difference between the two male couples and the rest of our sample is that the male couples spent much less time watching television. TV accounts for 53% of leisure time observations for the 30 heterosexual couples (see Table 6) but only 8% for the two-father couples (see Table 7). We cannot attach any significance to this, given the sample size and given that many economic and non-economic factors may be at play here, but it may be of note that the parents in the co-fathered families have relatively high education and income levels, which

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Table 5. Mothers' and fathers' leisure observations by time and day, expressed as percentages (30 heterosexual married couples).

Time	Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thur	Sat	Total	Weekday	Weekend
Mother									
Morning									
5:20-5:50					0		0	0	
6:00–6:50	33	0	0	5	8	100	7	5	60
7:00–7:50	50	0	4	0	0	12	4	1	23
8:00–8:50	16	0	0	0	0	5	8	0	10
9:00–9:50	11			0		12	11	0	12
10:00–10:50	11					10	10		10
11:00–11:50	4					13	8		8
Afternoon									
12:00–13:50	6					7	6		6
14:00–15:50		0	0	10	27		13	13	
16:00–16:50	0	0	0	6	17		5	7	0
17:00–17:50	14	0	0	9	6		8	5	14
Evening									
18:00–18:50	14	0	15	12	4		11	9	14
19:00–19:50	21	28	18	12	17		18	17	21
20:00–20:50	30	18	13	18	29		23	20	30
21:00–21:50	7	14	19	26	32		19	24	7
22:00–22:20		0	0	100			40	40	
Mother average	16	10	10	11	13	11	13	11	14
Father									
Morning									
5:20–5:50					0		0	0	
6:00–6:50	0	0	9	21	14	50	15	15	20
7:00–7:50	15	5	3	15	12	19	11	10	17
8:00–8:50	16	20	10	12	0	14	14	11	15
9:00–9:50	13	0	0	0		17	12	0	15
10:00–10:50	22					32	25		26
11:00–11:50	17					18	18		18
Afternoon									
12:00–13:50	8					0	4		4
14:00–15:50		0	14	0	25		10	10	
16:00–16:50	38		0	16	57		23	19	38
17:00–17:50	24	0	8	9	3		13	6	24
Evening									
18:00–18:50	14	0	7	17	21		15	15	14
19:00–19:50	26	29	15	23	27		24	23	26
20:00–20:50	40	32	34	33	59		42	42	40
21:00–21:50	30	100	39	21	30		31	31	30
22:00–22:20			0	100			50	50	
Father average	22	18	17	20	27	18	21	22	21

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Table 6. Mothers' and fathers' indoor leisure activities (30 heterosexual married couples).

Activity category	Mother	Father	Mother percent leisure	Father percent leisure	Total
Alcohol	1	1	0.3	0.2	2
Craft/hobby	0	5	0.0	1.1	5
Exercise	0	1	0.0	0.2	1
Game/puzzle	24	21	7.0	4.4	45
Home decoration	0	0	0.0	0.0	0
Internet	5	10	1.5	2.1	15
Observing family	15	34	4.4	7.2	49
Other	3	9	0.9	1.9	12
Pets	5	1	1.5	0.2	6
Playing (with child)	25	15	7.3	3.2	40
Political activity	0	0	0.0	0.0	0
Read	66	88	19.2	18.5	154
Rest	7	17	2.0	3.6	24
Smoke	3	0	0.9	0.0	3
Sports	0	1	0.0	0.2	1
TV	185	249	53.9	52.4	434
Video game	4	23	1.2	4.8	27
Total	343	475	100.0	100.0	818

Table 7. Fathers' indoor leisure activities (two co-fathered families).

Activity category	Parent A	Parent B	Total	Percent leisure
Alcohol	0	0	0	0.0
Craft/hobby	3	0	3	4.8
Exercise	5	0	5	7.9
Game/puzzle	4	4	8	12.7
Home decoration	1	1	2	3.2
Internet	0	0	0	0.0
Observing family	0	0	0	0.0
Other	2	0	2	3.2
Pets	0	0	0	0.0
Playing (with child)	3	6	9	14.3
Political activity	1	1	2	3.2
Read	14	13	27	42.9
Rest	0	0	0	0.0
Smoke	0	0	0	0.0
TV	1	4	5	7.9
Video game	0	0	0	0.0
Total	34	29	63	100.0

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other scholars have noted to be correlated with reduced TV viewing time (Robinson & Godbey, 1997).

Shared leisure

If indoor leisure time for these dual-earner couples seems scarce, shared time between parents seems even more so. Parents in the 30 heterosexual couples enjoyed indoor leisure at the *same time* in 137 observations (far less than half of all indoor leisure observations). But not even all of these were *shared* leisure. Indeed, just 100 of these 137 observations represented time spent in the same activity and the same room. Slightly more (80%) represented leisure time spent in the same room but not necessarily the same activity. Parents in the two co-fathered families had roughly the same amount of indoor leisure time as parents in the other families (15%, compared to 17% for the other families; see Tables 6 and 7) but spent still less of it together. Of the 14 observations of simultaneous indoor leisure for these fathers, just eight placed parents in the same room and seven of the eight in the same room and the same activity.

Television viewing, as noted earlier, was the most common indoor leisure activity by a large margin. This held true during parents' shared leisure time as well (Table 8). If no children participated, parents in heterosexual married couples did almost nothing other than watch TV (83% of leisure observations) or read (15% of observations). If at least one child participated in the leisure activity, these parents were more likely to play a formal game or puzzle (13%) or play with the child in another way (10%), but TV was still a dominant activity (63%). Simultaneous recreational reading (excluding

Table 8. Shared indoor leisure activities (all 32 families).

Activity category	Both parents with at least one child participating	Percent	Both parents with no children participating	Percent	Both parents total
Heterosexual couples (n = 30)					
Game/puzzle	8	13	0	0	8
Internet	1	2	0	0	1
Other	3	5	1	3	4
Playing with child	6	10	0	0	6
Read	3[a]	5	6	15	9
TV	38	63	33[b]	83	71
Watching video game	1	2	0	0	1
Heterosexual couples subtotal	60	100	40	100	100
Co-fathers (n = 2)					
Home decoration	0	0	1	20	1
Read	2[c]	100	4	80	6
Co-fathers subtotal	2	100	5	100	7

[a]Reading was the parents' primary activity. The shared activity was reading (n = 1), talking (n = 1), and watching TV (n = 1).

[b]In 17 cases, at least one child watched TV at the same time but in another room.

[c]The shared activity was reading in both cases.

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schoolwork) of parents and children was rare overall but more common in the families with two fathers.

Parents' qualitative assessments

During their self-narrated home tours, parents speak frequently about chores and home maintenance issues and less often about their leisure moments. But when they do address their indoor leisure time experiences, the television is a common theme. Watching TV shows, big sporting events, and movies at home is frequently acknowledged to be a favourite activity for the whole family. It is also mentioned as an important relaxing activity for a few individuals. 'I'm a couch potato', said one father. 'On the weekends and whenever I get the opportunity'. Given a small but active popular anti-TV movement in the USA, including activities such as TV-turnoff week, one might expect some respondents to downplay the amount of TV watched or to express frustration with time spent watching. One respondent in a 1999 survey in the US Midwest, when asked how she would change family time spent together, said she wanted to 'blow up the TV' (Roxburgh, 2006, p. 541). In contrast, in our study, most mentions of TV are neutral or positive, with only a few people expressing concern about the amount of time spent. The living room or family room couch is often mentioned as the locus for family TV watching. One mother notes, 'I like to sit and watch TV on the sofa … to sit and relax'. Another says, 'We watch TV and talk, we hang out, we relax' on the couch.

A few fathers or mothers mention sitting by the living room fireplace to relax (often in conjunction with viewing the TV), and a few others explain that they entertain in the kitchen or the living room when they have guests. One or two notations are made about playing musical instruments or reading in living room areas of the home. One mother focuses on reading in a cosy sitting area that is part of her kitchen: 'I sit and light a fire and read. It's really peaceful and nice when the kids are asleep'.

Another persistent theme is parental laments about leisure activities that are *not* being pursued by the family. Upon filming a dartboard that used to be a favourite activity, one father exclaimed, 'We haven't done it in three years. Hey, that's a good idea. I should do it today'. Several parents note that they had set aside their musical instruments (piano, guitar, drums) for lack of time or concerns about noise, although the instruments are still in the home.

Some parents clearly express the difficulties associated with getting any leisure time at all. This is a common complaint across the USA, with 57% of married fathers and 71% of married mothers in a 2000 survey asserting that they have too little time for themselves (Bianchi et al., 2006, p. 135). One father in our study said, 'I'll try to go to sleep late or wake up early – preferably not both at the same time, on the same day – so I can have space and time for myself to do whatever'. Another mother comments that 'unless I wake up at five o'clock in the morning, you know, I don't have really any spare time'. Our scan sampling data suggest that some mothers routinely rise early to carve out a bit of leisure time before other people in the house awaken.

Discussion and conclusions

Our in-depth, ethnographic observations of 32 Los Angeles dual-earner families effectively complement self-reported time-use studies such as time diaries and experience

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sampling method (ESM) time diaries by contributing previously unavailable types of activity data for US middle-class families. Scan sampling analysis permits detailed examinations of inter-family variability, activity records collected at narrow, systematic time intervals, and interactive behaviour of all people in the home, none of which are typically addressed with survey and self-reported time-diary data. We also can draw on family members' self-narrated home tours and our film for an array of qualitative data. Our time-use results are consistent with other studies that have much larger samples (Broege et al., 2007). Although we include two co-fathered families in our sample, we are primarily describing the leisure patterns of heterosexual dual-earner parents.

We can now return to the issues raised at the beginning of the paper. Do the homes of these middle-class, two-income parents serve as refuges in which adults recover from the stresses of the working week and nourish bonds with their spouses and children? Does the home perhaps serve this function for one gender but not the other? If we look at the amount of leisure time these adults experience inside at home, the house may be less of a refuge than imagined. The small amounts of leisure time reported here also include very limited *shared* leisure time.

Mirroring USA time-diary-based studies, we find that men have more leisure time than women on average (Mattingly & Bianchi, 2003; Sayer, 2005). In their analysis of time-diary data from Australia, Bittman and Wajcman (2000) found that men and women report similar amounts of leisure time, but the women's time is more often combined with unpaid work and is more frequently interrupted. Unlike Bittman and Wajcman, we did not classify leisure activities combined with unpaid work as leisure time. When only 'pure' leisure is examined, we, like Bittman and Wajcman (2000), find that men on average enjoy notably more. The average leisure gap per day reported by several studies is approximately 30 minutes in favour of men (Mattingly & Bianchi, 2003, p. 1014; Sayer, 2005, p. 296).

Because we are able to match husbands and wives in our data set, we see that these averages do not tell the whole story. Married couples in our study can be divided into four groups based on how they experience leisure time. In the first group (27% of cases), mothers actually have more indoor leisure than their spouses. Other researchers have observed that some women feel strongly entitled to leisure as it is classically defined, and this is reflected in the domestic responsibilities they accept and organise (Karsten, 1995; Wearing, 1990).

Fathers have more leisure time in the remaining three groups, but the size of the leisure gap varies considerably across the groups. In the second group (27%), leisure is almost equally divided between spouses. The fathers in these couples have small amounts of extra leisure, one to three observations more – up to 30 minutes – over the course of our observation period. In the third group (33%), fathers clearly have moderately more leisure than mothers, with an average of eight more leisure observations. Yet it is only in the fourth group (13% of couples) that there is a very pronounced leisure gap in favour of fathers, who have an average of 23 more leisure observations during the study. Mothers in the fourth group expressed deep dissatisfaction with the imbalance of free time and household obligations unless the father performed family tasks such as cooking (in which case the imbalance went either unnoticed or unremarked upon).

Men in the two co-fathered families display greater equality in leisure time and much less television viewing than the heterosexual couples, although we cannot generalise from such a small sample. The domestic equality we observed in these

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households is not necessarily representative; only one-quarter of the same-sex couples have such an egalitarian domestic life, according to one study (Carrington, 1999, p. 184). The domestic lives of same-sex couples deserve considerably more research.

For both men and women, we see a pattern of considerable interruption of indoor leisure time. Although a few of the fathers enjoyed indoor leisure events whose duration was in the range of 90–120 minutes, fully 90% of leisure events for both mothers and fathers lasted one half hour or less. Indeed, most of these were experienced as fragmented leisure moments lasting fewer than 10 minutes. Events of more than one hour were rare.

Home leisure consists primarily of TV viewing in the family room or living room. We observe, as do Robinson and Godbey (1997, p. 149), that 'television remains the dominant feature of … free time'. Although other studies find a low degree of satisfaction with TV watching, the qualitative results from our work do not suggest an overly negative view of television among our participants. Many see it as an enjoyable activity that sometimes brings together family members. This shared experience may have benefits; shared TV-watching time, like other shared leisure activities, is positively correlated with marital stability (Hill, 1988). TV may also be useful for exhausted working parents when it allows parents to rest while children are quiet and occupied. Other activities, such as crafts or games, could require more energy than parents have at the end of the day.

Leisure is an important component of family life, but it is in short supply for dual-earner parents. Our work documents leisure patterns at home for these parents, both alone and shared by children. The results indicate that only about 15% of parents' time at home appears to be dedicated to leisure activities. Of that leisure time, nearly all is experienced indoors, much of it in passive and often non-interactive contexts like TV watching. There are also gender inequalities in how often, when during the day, and where in the house that parents spend their leisure time, although these inequalities are more pronounced in some families than others.

Many parents in the study, both mothers and fathers, state in their interviews and home tours that their leisure time is too limited to balance the stresses and obligations resulting from their jobs, their need to keep up the home, and their children's busy schedules. This leisure shortage is not going away any time soon since the percentage of women with children in the workforce continues to increase, and children raised by dual-earner couples expect to become dual-earner parents themselves (Boushey, 2005; Whelan, 2006).

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Acknowledgements

This study is part of an interdisciplinary, collaborative research endeavour conducted by members of the UCLA Center on Everyday Lives of Families (CELF) under the direction of Elinor Ochs. CELF is generously supported by the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation program on the Workplace, Workforce, and Working Families, headed by Kathleen Christensen. The authors gratefully acknowledge Elinor Ochs and CELF faculty, post-doctoral scholars, graduate students, and staff for their fieldwork efforts, comments, and other assistance. Thanks also go to two anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments on this paper. A major debt is owed to the working families who participated in this study for opening their homes and sharing their lives.

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